

31st October 2021 – Morning Service

Back to basics

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship - Psalm136:1-2

Oh, Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For his love endures forever.

Oh, Give thanks to the God of gods! For His love endures forever

StF 15 – The splendour of the King

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| 1) The splendour of the King, clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice
Let all the earth rejoice
He wraps himself in Light,
And darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice
And trembles at His voice | 2) Age to age He stands and time is in His hands
Beginning and the end
Beginning and the end
The Godhead Three in One
Father Spirit Son
The Lion and the Lamb
The Lion and the Lamb |
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Ch) *How great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God*

Br) Name above all names
Worthy of all praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God

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Prayers of Praise and Confession

Almighty God, you are our heavenly Father, We praise you for your amazing and extravagant love, a love that knows no limit. We praise you for this love that gives us hope, joy and courage; this love that never lets us down and which will never let us go. We praise that you are a Sovereign God of holiness saturated and overflowing with love. We praise that you desire to reach into our lives, deal with our fears and heal our brokenness. We praise you that in your wisdom and grace when we wandered away from a relationship with the Almighty God you did not leave us to search for you. You came to us in Jesus and even now you seek us, come amongst us that with but a desire to seek you we shall find you.

In this moment we seek you for forgiveness, cleansing and healing. Not just the simple forgiving of the silly things we have done this week but the deeper cleansing and healing we discover we need as we grow closer to Jesus.

[A moment of quiet for personal reflection]

Father forgive us, change us and assure us your grace is always sufficient. Let us hear your words of grace spoken into our heart and mind – “Your sins are forgiven.” Mighty God, Wonderful Saviour, ever present Spirit, in worship we meet you, in worship you meet with us, all life is to be worship; fill us afresh with your Spirit that this is how it shall be; all life a God-encounter. For in the name of Jesus we offer ourselves in praise and worship. **Amen.**

Reading: Deuteronomy 6:1- 9

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

[Note to churches using this service for an LA – if the following is unsuitable for your congregation, a suitable alternative might be StF 73 – Fill thou my life]

StF 77 – Give thanks to the Lord

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| 1) Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King:
His love endures forever.
For He is good, He is above all things.
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise. | <i>Ch) Forever, God is faithful
Forever, God is strong
Forever, God is with us, forever
Forever, God is faithful
Forever, God is strong
Forever, God is with us, forever, forever</i> |
| 2) With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,
His love endures forever
For the life that's been reborn
His love endures forever
Sing praise, sing praise,
Sing praise, sing praise | 3) From the rising to the setting sun,
His love endures forever.
By the grace of God, we will carry on.
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise
Sing praise, sing praise |

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Reading: Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength", and "to love one's neighbour as oneself",—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Sermon – Back to Basics

"Back to basics" was the cry of John Major in 1993 at the Conservative Party Conference held in Blackpool. The campaign was intended as a nostalgic appeal to traditional values such as neighbourliness, decency and courtesy. It became the subject of ridicule when a number of his politicians were caught up in scandals. Is it time, as a Circuit, we got "back to basics" and reassessed what it is we are about? Or as one of my colleagues put it whilst the Circuit Leadership Team was on retreat, "become radical". Being Radical can seem a dirty word at times, as it has been associated with extremism and radicalisation. To be radical is to go back to the roots, the beginnings, and the basics; in the Christian context it is not a bad thing to do. "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus was asked by the scribe Mark 12:28. "Which is the primary rule for living within the faith of Israel?" "What is it that underpins all we are called to be and do as a nation?" Are perhaps other ways of asking the question. Jesus gives the answer, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." He then adds to it a second "commandment" about loving ones neighbour as oneself quoting from Leviticus 19:18 as we would refer to it.

What are the basics of being Church?

Our primary purpose was summed up, I believe, in the great commission recorded at the end of Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew 28:17-20 - *When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

We are called to make disciples of all nations. At times it seems that part of the Church has lost track of its primary purpose.

Many years ago I was at a meeting of the Lay Workers Connexional Advisory Committee. The meeting included the then Chair of the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District, Rev John Sampson, I lent across to him and asked, "When are we becoming Methodist Church PLC?" There was so much conversation about management styles and business models going on that God's way seemed to have been forgotten.

At a Bible Study group I was part of, on the evening of the 17th October, we were reminded that we are part of a Spiritual battle whilst living in a physical world. We can so easily forget, or ignore, the spiritual dimension of our struggle. Our enemies are not purely of flesh and blood, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *"we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness in this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places."* (Eph. 6:12)

In 2011 The General Secretary of the Methodist Church presented a report which included;- *"As disciples of Jesus we are called to become the Church God wants us to be. This will involve making some tough decisions. We don't have all the resources we would like to have but God has not given up on us. We must work hard to become a Church that demonstrates our faith through a commitment to justice and serving our local, national and international communities."*

The wide-ranging report, entitled 'Contemporary Methodism: A discipleship movement shaped for mission' addressed issues from church buildings to evangelism and the nature of local ministry. On property, Dr Atkins said: "We unquestionably have too many church buildings: too many in the wrong places, too many unfit to sustain our life as a discipleship movement shaped for mission today. We too readily associate the sustaining of the life of our chapels with the work of God's kingdom - these often overlap but they're not the same thing. A more sacrificial, strategic approach is needed. Our churches must not exist simply to perpetuate the status quo, but to provide a place where people can come to faith and be nurtured in their journey with Christ." The report was warmly received by the Conference, which commended it to the whole Church for study, response and action.

Do we have congregations committed to the way of Christ or little businesses all over the country seeking to survive economic hardships? Do we have fellowships of Christians seeking to be the living presence of Jesus? *"Jesus did not give a mission to His church; He formed a church for His mission. Without the mission, a church is not a church; it's just a group of disobedient Christians hanging out."* (Christopher Wright).

Earlier in the year every member in the Vale of Stour Circuit should have received a booklet and a card. The booklet was entitled "A Brief Guide to a Methodist Way of Life" and the card challenged each of us to rethink our commitment to Christ and his Church and how we work it out. Near the beginning of the booklet we read, "The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission."

Can you remember reading the booklet? What have you done about it? Where is the commitment card? 10 years ago we were told tough decisions need making but how many have been taken? I know some people in our churches who want tough decisions to be taken and are frustrated by lack of such things happening.

I am not the gardener in the family but I am aware, as Jesus was, that pruning is essential to healthy growth. Cutting back can enable healthy growth leaving alone things go wild. During the last 20 months many activities stopped in our Church buildings due to Covid. Many of our activities as individuals stopped due to Covid. As we move forward we need to make sure that we do not just return to how things were prior to January 2020 but look at a new pattern of life, as individuals and as fellowship communities; pruning is needed. "The Methodist Way of life," calls us to look at how we live in relationship to God and our neighbour, the two commandments Jesus referred to in the passage above. Often the church seems to see its role as "to be nice" or, "to keep the business going." Disciples are called to be prophets not to make profits.

Is our church community prophetic or profit motivated?

Is it time to go back and reassess what we are and what we are to be?

During the Circuit Leadership Team retreat we reflected on where we are, what has been and what should be. We believe there is a need to refocus upon discipleship within our fellowships so that we can make disciples of others. How can we make of others that which we are not ourselves?

I finish with an illustration inspired by Rev Brian Hoare, a former tutor at Cliff College, a former Secretary of the Home Missions Division of the Methodist Church and President of the Methodist Church in 1995.

The Tennis Club that stopped playing Tennis.

Four people played tennis on a local communal court. They invited others to play as well. They formed a club, they bought some ground and built a court. Numbers grew and they built a clubhouse, primarily it was little more than changing facilities. They had extra land so they laid a bowls green and a croquet lawn. Others joined to play bowls and croquet. More people joined to enjoy the social life of the club. Trips were organised; outings enjoyed, holidays taken together. The clubhouse became too small so they built a social club. They were still called the tennis club but no one played.

How much Tennis do we play? How many tennis courts do we need?

StF 682 – God of grace and God of glory

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| 1) God of grace and God of glory,
On your people pour your power;
Crown your ancient church's story;
Bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
For the facing of this hour. | 3) Lo, the hosts of evil round us
Scorn your Christ, assail his ways!
Fears and doubts too long have bound us;
Free our hearts to work and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
For the living of these days. |
| 2) Heal your children's warring madness;
Bend our pride to your control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
Rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
Lest we miss your kingdom's goal. | 4) |

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Prayers of Intercession

Think of a place you have heard of in the news this week that has caused you to wonder about life and human behavior. Place it with God...[Silence]

L: Give thanks to the Lord **R: For His love endures forever**

Think of a situation in our own land that has touched your heart and mind. Place it with God...[Silence]

L: Give thanks to the Lord **R: For His love endures forever**

Think of the Church community you are part of. Place them before God....[Silence]

L: Give thanks to the Lord **R: For His love endures forever**

Think of a person you know who is finding life difficult at this time, whatever the reason.

Place them before God....[Silence]

L: Give thanks to the Lord **R: For His love endures forever**

Think of a person you love and are grateful for. Place them before God....[Silence]

L: Give thanks to the Lord **R: For His love endures forever**

Think of your own life; your biggest concern at this moment. Place yourself before God....[Silence]

L: Give thanks to the Lord **R: For His love endures forever**

We join in the Prayer our faithful God has given to his people as we say together.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 691 – What shall our greeting be

1) What shall our greeting be:
Sign of our unity?
'Jesus is Lord!'
May we no more defend
Barriers he died to end:
Give me your hand, my friend -
One Church, one Lord!

2) What is our mission here?
He makes his purpose clear:
One world, one Lord!
Spirit of truth, descend;
All our confusions end:
Give me your hand, my friend -
'Jesus is Lord!'

3) He comes to save us now:
To serve him is to know
Life's true reward.
May he our lives amend,
All our betrayals end:
Give me your hand, my friend -
'Jesus is Lord!'

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Dismissal & Blessing

Go into God's world, assured of Christ's presence, aware of his goodness and guidance and above all the certainty of His love. **Amen**

May the Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon us; fill us, and over flow from us as a blessing to others. **Amen**